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SIPDIS

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TAGS: [KMDR](#) [KPAO](#) [OPRC](#) [TW](#)

SUBJECT: TAIWAN'S ICRT STRUGGLING TO KEEP ITS FREQUENCY AND
STAY ON THE AIR

Classified By: ADIR DAVID KEEGAN, REASON 1.4(B)

1.(C) Summary: A year-old battle between Taiwan's only English-language radio station ICRT and the Government Information Office (GIO) has resumed as the DPP government attempts to make good on its campaign promise to legitimize underground radio stations by giving them frequencies. The re-organization of Taiwan's radio spectrum would involve re-locating ICRT at a new frequency, thereby necessitating major expenditures for ICRT. ICRT's management says the station would essentially be forced out of business. Expat community leaders and a number of Western representative offices in Taiwan have urged the government to make an exception allowing ICRT to stay in its current position. End Summary.

2.(C) ICRT holds a desirable location in the middle of the dial and broadcasts on super-strength- it was originally used as a tool to jam PRC broadcasts into Taiwan. In the 2004 presidential campaign, the DPP counted on illegal underground radio stations to mobilize supporters. The DPP reportedly promised the radio operators that they would be legitimized by the new government. Pressure from the radio operators to make good on that promise, combined with a desire to diversify the media in Taiwan has led to a plan to totally overhaul Taiwan's radio spectrum. The plan calls for approximately 30% of radio stations to be relocated on the spectrum, as well as to have their broadcast strength reduced. This would allow more stations to squeeze into the spectrum. ICRT would be moved to the very end of the spectrum- the Siberia of radio frequencies- and would be reduced to a medium-strength broadcaster. The move would require ICRT to build a costly and entirely new network of relay stations, potentially driving the company out of business.

3.(C) Nelson Chang, Chairman of ICRT's Board of Directors, alleges the move is politically motivated since ICRT received support from the KMT government since 1979. Once the DPP took over, he says ICRT lost all its government funding and was evicted from its facilities on public land. He sees this latest move as an attempt to marginalize ICRT even further and put increased financial pressure on its operations. Chang claimed to AIT that the way in which the GIO has handled the reorganization has been sloppy and so clearly partisan as to be "almost laughable". He read us a letter from the GIO claiming that ICRT had agreed to move to its new frequency without any financial assistance from the government. He also showed us a return letter, sent September 23, saying this was patently untrue. He says that the other radio stations targeted by the reorganization make it clear it is a political move- the other major target being the Broadcasting Corporation of China (BCC), a KMT-owned station.

4.(C) The issue has been prominent in the press over the last week as the American Chamber of Commerce and Taipei's Community Service Center (a major service center for the expatriate community founded with the assistance of AIT) made statements to the press and representations to the GIO on ICRT's behalf. They have asked that ICRT be given a special exception because of the important role it plays in disseminating emergency and public safety information to foreigners living in Taiwan. The public statements are said to have created pressure on the government to find a workable compromise with ICRT. Those organizations as well as representatives of Western trade offices are keeping up the pressure. Nelson Chang says that ICRT and the GIO have entered the end game and it will result in one of three options: 1) ICRT remaining at its current location with its current strength, 2) ICRT moving to a new location and/or being reduced to medium-strength, but with financial assistance from the government to make the changes, or 3) ICRT being forced into those changes, Chang resigning his position and the radio station going out of business due to financial hardship.

5.(C) COMMENT: This is a battle that ICRT has fought and weathered before. While it is hard to believe that the government's ultimate goal is to drive ICRT out of business, it may be that its continued existence is not commercially viable in light of the other goals of the GIO. ICRT has had

continuing financial problems since 1999, as have Taiwan's English-language newspapers. There simply is no model for a financially successful, locally produced, English-language media outlet in Taiwan. A decision to make an exception for ICRT would likely need to be politically motivated by a desire to keep Taiwan's expat community happy.

KEEGAN